

on the ball, Mr. Speaker, we should reject this resolution and pass the Spratt amendment. This is the American way.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS), a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

Mr. Speaker, this Nation once again considers a course of action that will define our moral standing in the history of free peoples. I agree that America should speak with one voice in response to the challenges to international peace, security, and human rights posed by the regime in Iraq. That voice must be founded on the most fundamental of moral principles: the sanctity of human life.

The value of human life has been the basis for the settled, bipartisan international policy toward Iraq that we in this Congress have expressed in the past. In 1998, Congress reflected a strong, unified voice when we voted to support legislation that noted Iraq's violation of U.N. disarmament demands to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction, as well as their development.

In that same year, we also enacted the Iraq Liberation Act that authorized U.S. support for Iraqi liberation forces in their efforts to replace the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. We did so because Saddam Hussein has proven himself to be a serious threat to regional stability in the Middle East, a growing threat to the United States, and a leader who deserves to be tried in an international tribunal for crimes against humanity. However, we did not authorize the unilateral use of U.S. military forces towards that end.

Neither the American people nor their elected representatives have wavered in our support for the values of human rights, security, international stability, and democracy reflected in those 1998 congressional resolutions.

However, as we consider this resolution, we must not forget one essential fact. As the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has concluded, we have seen no evidence or no intelligence to suggest that Iraq indeed poses an imminent threat to our Nation. In the absence of an imminent threat to the United States, I cannot support the resolution proposed by the Bush administration that would authorize preemptive military strikes by the U.S. forces to enforce all relevant U.N. resolutions, some of which deal with issues other than Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

I agree with the senior Senator from West Virginia, who has observed that the President's proposed resolution is dangerously hasty, redefines the nature of defense, and reinterprets the Constitution to suit the will of the executive branch.

The resolution proposed by the administration would codify the doctrine of preemption, the assertion that America has the unilateral right to attack a nation that has not attacked us. This, in my view, would be a precedent with disastrous consequences. A unilateral first strike would almost certainly result in substantial loss of life, both among American troops and among Iraqi civilians. A unilateral first strike would undermine the moral authority of the United States and could set a devastating international precedent that we could then see echoed in conflicts between India and Pakistan, Russia and Georgia, China and Taiwan, and in many other corners of the world.

In addition, unilateral U.S. action may well destabilize the Middle East, harming the international cooperation that we need to defend America against terrorism.

Experts tell us that the United States might have to remain in Iraq for a decade, a commitment requiring international support and engagement.

Finally, the economic costs of going it alone would undermine the ability of our Nation to address our unmet domestic priorities.

Although this resolution would authorize the President to take this Nation to war, it is not a declaration of war, it is a blank check to use force without the moral or political authority of a declaration of war. Congress must not abandon its authority under the Constitution. This resolution would do just that.

The course of action that is more consistent with the values and security interests of the United States is to support a multinational collective security strategy towards the threats to regional peace and international stability that are posed by the regime in Iraq. The administration has indicated some progress within the United Nations Security Council towards that goal. I join the President in urging all members of the Council to act with due diligence.

I also join in the position advanced by our colleague, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT), who has proposed that we once again authorize U.S. military support for a renewed and strengthened U.N. Security Council resolution that demands true disarmament by Iraq. This is a threat that the civilized world must face together. The regime of Saddam Hussein, after all, is the world's problem as well as our own.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), a member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

Mr. Speaker, our Nation is on the verge of opening a new front in the global war on terror. It is a front fraught with peril. It is a front that may send thousands of young Americans, men and women, to uproot a

ruthless dictator that has committed unspeakable acts against his own people and wrought havoc on the world.

No decision is more difficult, more wrenching for a U.S. President, the Congress, or the American people than to commit our soldiers and our Nation's prestige to a military conflagration. It is for this reason that we must consider all possible diplomatic and military options short of war.

As noted 19th century French author Guy de Maupassant wrote, "Every government has as much of a duty to avoid war as a ship's captain has to avoid a shipwreck."

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Spratt substitute to House Joint Resolution 114. It offers the best and most certain way to achieve our objectives of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and the best chance of avoiding a hasty decision to go to war. It is a sensible, prudent approach to managing the use of force by our country.

Eleven years ago, then President George Bush created one of the most impressive multinational coalitions that the world has ever seen. He very wisely determined that it was not in our Nation's interest to act unilaterally to liberate Kuwait.

The Spratt substitute is informed by that experience. It limits the opportunity of our current President for unilateral action to liberate Iraq.

I am pleased that President George W. Bush has engaged the U.N. during the current crisis. I am grateful that he has recognized that our Nation should work with the United Nations Security Council and allow weapons inspections to go forward and this process to occur.

□ 0030

I am relieved the President said that war is not inevitable. And I am encouraged that he has said that he would give a diplomatic course to disarm Iraq through a U.N. process every chance to work ahead of using force.

Mr. Speaker, the Spratt resolution guarantees the President's stated intentions are made law. As set forth in the Spratt substitute, our Armed Forces should take action only against Iraq only in conjunction with a new U.N. Security Council resolution that calls for the complete elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

If the U.N. Security Council resolution is violated or the U.N. does not act, the President would need approval from Congress for unilateral action, and then only after making certain important certifications to Congress. Thus, this vote would occur only if the President has certified that further U.N. action is not forthcoming, force remains the only viable option, a broadbased international coalition is being formed, and the global war on terrorism would not be adversely affected by an Iraqi invasion.

Mr. Speaker, there is no such thing as prudent haste. It is an understatement to say that we should take the